



# PICACHO

STATE RECREATION AREA

## Geology

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Those who would further enrich their visit to Picacho would do well to explore the rich geological background of this area. Picacho Peak — a plug-dome volcanic outcropping — and certain other land features are symptoms of fairly recent volcanic activity in this area, and there are many other almost equally obvious land features — vivid colors, unusual shapes exposed and preserved by desert conditions — that each tell part of this area's complex geological story.

## Facilities

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Each of the 50 campsites in the main campground has a table and fire ring. Piped drinking water a shower and restrooms are nearby. Two group camping areas, one of them designed for boat-in use, can be reserved by contacting the Recreation Area Headquarters.

A day use area with tables, fire rings, piped drinking water, and a boat ramp is located at the headquarters campground.

## Desert Safety

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Respect the desert, and you need not fear it. Keep these points in mind:

- Know your physical limits in the heat and rugged desert terrain. Summer temperatures can reach 120°F.
- ALWAYS carry plenty of water...and drink it! It does you no good in your canteen.
- Don't hike alone — use the buddy system.
- Tell companions and park headquarters of your trip plans...and be out on time, or rangers will be searching for you.
- Be sure your car has plenty of gas and a GOOD spare tire and keep it stocked with extra water, shovel, tools and blankets.
- If your vehicle breaks down, *stay with it!* It's much easier to find a vehicle than a wandering person.
- Should you find yourself in trouble, DON'T PANIC. If you've followed the above precautions, help will soon be on the way.

**P**icacho State Recreation Area is located in the lower Colorado River Basin just 25 miles north of Yuma. Fifty-five miles of open river and many backwater lakes are accessible from the recreation area. (Parker Dam is 40 miles upstream, Imperial Dam is 15 miles downstream.) The area is known for its spectacular desert scenery and rich variety of river wildlife, however, Picacho is especially fascinating to those who wish to explore the geological and historical background of the great river and the surrounding, lower Colorado Desert. Currently the most popular recreation activities at Picacho include camping, fishing, river-running, and desert exploration.

## Access

The road to Picacho from Winterhaven is paved only for the first 6 miles. The rest of the — 18 miles — is over a rough, dirt road that is passable for cars and vehicles with small trailers. At times during the summer thunder storms are likely to cause flash flooding in the washes, temporarily making short sections of the road impassable.

As in any desert country, travellers on this road should carry extra water, fuel, and other essential supplies. All motor vehicles should be kept on the authorized routes of travel. In case of trouble it is best to keep calm and remain near your vehicle and in the shade until help arrives.

## Activities

Temperatures at Picacho range from a wintertime low of 20 degrees to a summertime high of 120 degrees. The most popular time of year is between mid-October and the end of April, although hardy adventurers enjoy the park's remoteness, water sports, and fishing on a year-round basis. During the late winter, spring and early summer there is a magnificent display of desert wildflowers throughout this region. However, from April on into mid-summer mosquitos are a problem near water areas, especially the relatively quiet backwater lakes. The autumn and early spring months are the most popular time to float down the river. Warm, sun-washed autumn days combine with the strong, gentle current to make cruising down this scenic stretch of water a very peaceful, idyllic and rewarding experience. The best fishing is for black bass, channel catfish, flathead catfish, crappie and bluegill.

## Flora and Fauna

From a distance, especially to the uninitiated, the rugged mountains and washes of the Colorado Desert look uninhabited. The land seems to be entirely devoid of life, and baked dry by the sun's relentless heat. However, throughout the area dominated by Picacho Peak you will find that

even the most barren places are filled with life. Plants seem to sprout from the very rock itself, and in the springtime the delicate beauty of wildflowers is everywhere. Beavertail cactus and ocotillo put on the most consistent display but the variety of equally colorful, smaller flowers is endless. Near the river the numerous backwater lakes are lined with Carrizo cane and marsh tule. Feathery-leaved Tamarisk trees, an import from Africa, have taken over many of the oasis-like flats near the river, while desert ironwood, palo verde, cottonwood trees, mesquite, and other shrubs, as well as succulents, and three kinds of cactus, are native to this landscape.

The handsome and musical Gambel's quail is found at Picacho in considerable numbers along with cliff swallows, sparrows, towhees, cactus wrens, roadrunners, white-winged doves, and many other desert-dwelling birds. Buzzards and red-tailed hawks live here the year around, while in the spring and fall — thousands of migratory waterfowl can be seen including countless ducks and geese, as well as blue herons, snowy egrets, ibis, cormorants, and others.

Wildlife in the back country includes a considerable number of wild burros, as well as desert bighorn sheep, coyote, bobcat, raccoons, striped skunk, southern mule deer, and countless smaller animals such as the antelope ground squirrel and various kinds of mice. If you know where to look you may also find a large variety of insects, lizards, snakes, and amphibians. Muskrat and beaver can occasionally be seen in or close alongside the river.



## History

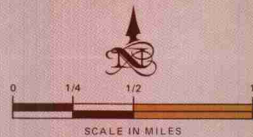
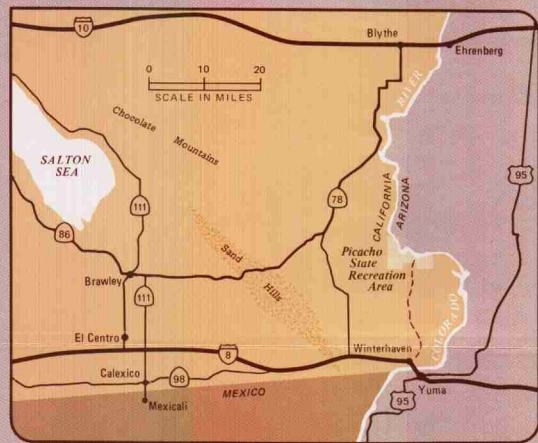
Archeological evidence indicates that Indians have lived along the Colorado River and throughout the vast reaches of the Colorado Desert for thousands of years. In historical times it was the Kwichyana, or Quechen, Indians who lived along this part of the river. Their myths and legends attach to every major feature of the landscape and in this particular area tend to center around Picacho Peak. Tall and physically impressive, the Quechen were known as a proud and warlike people. They crossed the river on logs, and rafts and shallow pottery vessels, and planted and harvested maize, beans, squash or gourds, and other crops in the moist silt of the river bottoms. Legends, general mythology and certain kinds of moral instruction were passed along from generation to generation by means of narrative song-cycles. The historical record notes that the Quechen gave great importance to dream experience, were generally outgoing, friendly, enthusiastic, capable of great feats of endurance.

Spanish explorers — under the command of Coronado — penetrated this part of the Colorado River Basin in 1540. Hernando de Alarcon came up the river the Sea of Cortez in 1540, and Melchior Diaz came overland. Both expeditions described the country itself and the Indians they found living along the river. Other Spanish explorers came later — Onate in 1600, Kino in 1701, Anza and Garces in 1774. All of these early contacts were more or less friendly. However, the first attempt to establish a permanent settlement and mission, La Purisima Concepcion at Yuma, met with disaster when the Indians rose up in 1781, destroyed the mission, and killed all of the Spaniards including Father Garces.

Gold is said to have been discovered along the Colorado River as early as 1862, but major development of this resource did not take place until around 1880. In 1890 a large stamp mill was built close beside the river at Picacho. Shortly afterward the Picacho Mine was opened in the Picacho Basin area and a narrow gauge railroad began hauling ore from the mine to the mill by way of Little Picacho Wash and Railroad Canyon. In 1904 when production was at its peak there were 700 men employed in the mine and mill, and the town of Picacho boasted a population of 2,500 people. It is estimated that total production of gold amounted to about 14 million dollars. Throughout this time the river itself was the major transportation route into and out of this desert country. A number of large, steam-powered, paddlewheeled ferry boats continually worked their way up and down the river. Today little evidence of this epic, early-day activity is visible, and the old townsite of Picacho is under water. However, just south of the campground and park headquarters the ruins of the Picacho Mill buildings can still be seen.

## Hunting

- Doves, quail and waterfowl may be hunted during normal seasons.
- Hunting is *NOT* permitted in the outlined headquarters campground area or other designated camping areas.
- Only shotguns may be used; valid hunting license must be in possession.
- Loaded firearms are prohibited at any other time.



———— MAIN ROADS  
- - - - JEEP TRAILS

Launch Ramp/Picnic Area

### Group Boat-in Camp

### Residences

Picacho Mills  
Historic Trail

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even 24 mi.

# Please Remember

## CAMPING

- Camping is permitted in designated areas only.
- Except for boat-in camping, reservations are made through Mistix by calling toll-free 1-800-446-PARK.

## VEHICLES

- All motor vehicles must use designated roads and parking areas.
- All vehicles must have a license plate — vehicles with off-road registration are **NOT** permitted.
- Drivers must have a valid driver's license in possession.

## FIRES

- Open ground fires are not allowed. Campfires are allowed in the fire rings found in the designated campsites and day use areas. Hibachis or barbecues may be used — do not dump ashes and coals on the ground; use the fire rings or carry them out.
- Bring your own fuel. Dead wood may not be gathered.

Picacho State Recreation Area  
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No Telephone



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